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SUBJECT: PART III: NORWEGIAN FM STOERE: THE WORLD AT HIS
FEET

Classified By: DCM Kevin M. Johnson for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1.(C) Summary. Jonas Gahr Stoere has served as Foreign Minister in the current Stoltenberg cabinet since its foundation in 2005. Known as an ambitious, skilled networker, Stoere represents the centrist-right wing of the Labor Party, and is very popular across Norwegian society. The 49-year-old largely determines the shape of Norway's foreign and security policy, towering over a weak MOD and leading a domestically-focused Prime Minister. He has gained influence globally beyond Norway's relative importance. Bolstered by domestic support and some notable international successes, Stoere believes he is morally superior to and smarter than most, and feels that he should have the ear of the Secretary of State. This attitude, along with Stoere's ceaseless attacks on the use of force, promotion of dialogue at all costs, disarmament, and independent peace-brokering, have at times created clashes with U.S. policy. His support for some Hamas' positions argues for caution in dealing with him on the Middle East. However, Stoere is an Atlanticist who places great value on a positive relationship with (and recognition from) the U.S. End Summary.

Stepping Stones to Power

2.(SBU) Stoere grew up in an upper-class setting and reportedly flirted with the center-right Høyre Party before choosing to work for the traditionally blue-collar Labor Party, a popular move in social-democratic Norway. An internationalist who received his education in Political Science in Paris and at Harvard Law School, his first major international position was as the World Health Organization's Chief of Staff. This position was followed by a year as Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg's Chief of Staff from 2000 to 2001. Stoere bolstered his credentials with the humanitarian community by serving as the Norwegian Red Cross' Secretary General from 2001 to 2005. After a heated run for the post, he was picked as FM in PM Stoltenberg's second government.

Dialogue at all Costs

3.(C) Internationally, Stoere has received attention on several key issues, illustrating his priorities and values. In 2007, he was the first (ultimately only joined by Switzerland) Western official to recognize the Hamas-led

coalition government and to provide aid to Hamas-controlled Ministries, urging other countries to lift sanctions. Despite the failure of the Unity Government, Stoere remains convinced of the rightness of his approach and has recently called for Hamas as well as the Palestinian Authority to be involved in talks on the future of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. Many members of parliament, including the President of the Storting (Labor) criticized Stoere for acting unilaterally on Hamas. His willingness to engage Hamas is not overlooked by the Israelis (with an Israel Embassy official having prominently displayed photos on his office wall of the MFA Vice Minister meetings with Hamas as an ironic statement.) On the other hand, Stoere gets kudos from the Israeli government for having productive meetings with their new Ambassador and taking proactive steps to discipline an MFA official who sent an anti-Semitic email.

4.(SBU) Stoere also vocally promotes continued dialogue with Russia, in NATO and outside. Proud of Norway's history of peace and constructive relationship with Russia in the Barents region, Stoere actively pushes for continued dialogue with Russia, even doing so shortly after the Georgia war.

Disarmament a Top Priority

5.(SBU) Reflecting his belief in disarmament, Stoere and Norway were among the most skeptical NATO allies regarding missile defense plans. Stoere only moderated his critical comments after a meeting with Secretary Rice where she clearly and publicly outlined her views. He did not choose to meet with General Obering, then commander of the Missile Defense Agency, during his visit to Oslo in May of 2008.

When it became clear that Norway stood alone in its willingness to veto the NATO missile defense proposal, Stoere worked to ensure language that Norway could approve, showing his understanding of NATO solidarity.

6.(SBU) The Oslo Cluster Munitions treaty, signed in December 2008, was a direct success for FM Stoere. Launching the initiative in February of 2007, Stoere called for an international treaty banning cluster munitions. In an impressive effort, his team succeeded in drafting the treaty and attracting over 100 signatories, including the majority of NATO allies. U.S. concerns over interoperability were dismissed as alarmist and it took high-level USG intervention to ensure that the treaty did not harm our ability to operate with NATO allies.

7. (SBU) With the successful conclusion of the cluster munitions treaty, Stoere's next target is nuclear disarmament. Norway has long supported the Non-Proliferation Treaty's disarmament aspects and was instrumental in the 2005 seven-nations' initiative calling for increases in the size and speed of disarmament activities. Norway hosted a nuclear disarmament conference in Oslo in February 2008 and is actively pushing for a renewed commitment to the NPT, test bans, and further reductions in nuclear weapons, including eliminating NATO's nuclear weapons.

Afghanistan and NATO

8.(SBU) Stoere has been a strong advocate of NATO's engagement in Afghanistan but has been critical of military aspects, believing civilian aid is the key factor. His attitude persists despite a dramatic trip to Afghanistan in January 2008 where he survived a terrorist attack on his hotel. The Minister's travel plans were announced in advance, and some claim that this caused the Taliban's timing of the attack. Despite criticism from the media and some political rivals, Stoere restated his emphasis on a civilian presence and helped push the successful candidacy of Kai Eide to head UN efforts. Stoere has backed up his position by ensuring that Afghanistan remains the largest recipient of Norwegian aid, and by continuing to support the Norwegian military presence in Northern Afghanistan.

Not Known for Negotiating Ability, but Looking for a Role?

¶9. (C) Norway is involved in Sudan, Tibet, Somalia, the Philippines, Colombia, Sri Lanka negotiations and peace promotion, but has had no clear successes since the 1996 Guatemala peace accords. Stoere himself has not participated in any peace negotiations, leaving the work on Sri Lanka to his Development Minister colleague. While smart and dynamic, some wonder if his arrogance might not be off-putting in a negotiation setting. It is worth noting that in a complicated division of responsibilities with the Development Minister, Stoere has retained control of development assistance in the Middle East and Afghanistan, indicating that he may be looking for a high-profile role in these two regions to try out his negotiating skills and boost his image.

10.(SBU) Stoere has clear ambitions for further high-office in Norway or abroad. He has a secure place on the Labor Party's nomination list for the September 2009's Parliamentary Elections and will enter Parliament, running for office for the first time. This is an opportunity to prove himself in domestic politics and an apparent move towards party leadership. Both pundits and the general public share a mutual belief that the stage is set for Stoere to become the new Labor party leader when Prime Minister and longtime friend Jens Stoltenberg steps down. Other suggestions are a possible career in the international arena, including Secretary General of NATO or high-level U.N. roles. In either path, a success in peacemaking would be a great plus.

Politician Turned Author

11.(SBU) In the fall of 2008, Foreign Minister Stoere wrote (directly or indirectly) two books. The first, "To Make a Difference," consists of a collection of essays reflecting on issues such as the United States, the Middle East, international law, Afghanistan, the High North (Arctic), health policy as well as anecdotes from his meetings with political leaders (including Ambassador Whitney and Deputy Secretary of State Negroponte). The book has become a national bestseller, thanks in part to the MFA buying a copy of the book for each employee.

¶12. (SBU) Writing the book spurred public debate: Stoere was the first Norwegian Foreign Minister since World War II to write a book while in office. Stoere writes that Norway needs to dare to test whether the established tenets of its foreign policy are still valid, suggesting that Norway needs to further focus on its own interests. Stoere devotes a chapter to the transatlantic ties, viewing the relationship between Norway and the U.S. as a dynamic and prosperous one, but with a few noticeable bumps in the road in the past years.

13.(SBU) Stoere also commissioned another book entitled, "Norwegian Interests: Foreign Policy for a Globalized World." This was a product of a year-long MFA project, defining the new challenges of the 21st century and reassessing Norway's national interests. The book concluded by prioritizing policies of particular interest to Norway as well as encouraging more debate and dialogue with the world outside.

¶14. (C) While many within MFA welcome the high profile the FM brings to the Ministry through his books and presence, others complain that he fails to listen and feels too superior--a cardinal sin in Norway. Some felt the title of his book was too Anglicized and the book itself self-promoting. They interpreted the book as an appeal to a global audience presumably in aid of obtaining a position outside Norway.

Comment

¶15. (C) Norwegian public opinion lionizes FM Stoere, who is consistently ranked as the most popular politician in Norway. He has built a strong domestic support base that could carry

him into the PM's office. He is a very intelligent, confident and active foreign minister and firmly believes reports about his growing influence and glowing future. Aside from some self-examinations after the terrorist attack on his hotel in Afghanistan, he has expressed no doubts about his policies or decisions, including his failed gambit to "lead" the West toward opening to Hamas after the foundation of the National Unity Government. Even in areas where he has little experience such as in direct peace negotiations, he clearly conveys his belief that his superior skills would make him invaluable.

¶14. (C) Skeptical about the use of force, and highly valuing dialogue and disarmament, Stoere's policies often clashed with those of the Bush Administration, but he worked hard to ensure close relations with Washington principals. He clearly appreciates Norway's close historical relationship with the U.S. and has a clear-headed understanding of Norway's reliance on the U.S. as its ultimate security guarantee. He also understands that tackling global problems closest to his heart (fighting poverty, climate change, Middle East peace, etc) will require cooperation with the U.S. He will remain an active and persistent voice for attention from the U.S. and could be a valuable ally in many international debates.

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